

Good evening and thank you Senator Winfield, Representative Blumenthal and distinguished members of the judicial committee. My name is Kristin O'Neill, I live in Fairfield, and I'm a volunteer with the Connecticut Chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. I have also volunteered with several other gun violence prevention organizations since 2017.

First of all, I want to speak on some of the specific gun violence prevention language in SB16. We have already heard from experts on criminal and juvenile justice, and I would like to defer to them when it comes to certain language in the bill. However, I, and the volunteers from Moms Demand Action would argue that gun violence absolutely is a public health crisis. Therefore we support the provision of the bill that "establishes a gun violence prevention and intervention program within the department of public health that will fund and grow community violence and gun violence prevention programs, collect data on firearm and stabbing-involved injuries and deaths, and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies implemented." City gun violence is an overlooked epidemic in the state of Connecticut. I'm fairly confident that many of my neighbors in Fairfield do not realize that there were 18 gun homicides in Bridgeport in 2020, and 14 gun homicides in 2021. Many of us speak out about the horrific school shootings that have occurred in CT, but do nothing about the lives lost just miles from our homes. I also know that there are many hard working gun violence prevention programs in our cities, such as Project Longevity and Street Safe. But from my experience, it can be difficult for these groups to connect. It can be even more difficult for these organizations to know where to go to access funding, in order to continue their important work. A state gun violence prevention and intervention program would help to alleviate these problems. Acknowledging that gun violence is a public health crisis could allow for more awareness and for more state funding to be directed towards prevention.

Second, I also want to support the language in SB16 that would "prohibit the carrying of firearms in most circumstances within 75 feet of any polling site, in any municipal or state building, government operated bus, train, or ferry, or generally within 250 feet of a public demonstration." I frequently volunteer as a poll stander on Election Day. After working on several local and state campaigns I truly believe it is important to thank voters for taking the time out of their day, and allowing their voices to be heard. I have seen voters on both sides of the aisle become extremely volatile while discussing issues and possible election outcomes at polling places. I would hate to see what could happen if a firearm was involved in one of those volatile conversations. I also believe that voting should be as safe as possible. No one should avoid voting because they fear for their personal safety.

Finally, we do have some ideological concerns with HB 5415. Assault weapons and high capacity magazines have dangerous effects in our communities and the state's goal should be to phase their ownership out through transfers to law enforcement, federally licensed firearm dealers, and out of state rather than between people within the state.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate your dedication to this important matter.